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ABSTRACT

An argument can be made for an expansion in the creative writing curriculum to cover all genres. The essential principles of writing in all genres, poetry, fiction, drama, TV, and film can be taught, with the positive effect of saving a serious writing student years of stumbling in the dark. A responsible creative writing course of the present and future must be sensitive to serious writing students' needs by preparing them for writing for radio, film, and TV, without ignoring the important, traditional genres. A course could be developed that might not contribute only to upgrading writing in the media but also afford the professionally bent student writer the best preparation by linking the genres, demonstrating, for example, how poetry and film must both move audiences a long distance in a relatively short space of time by shared techniques, such as controlling images, and a powerful, emotional closure. The course offers the more casual student a greater appreciation of writing, while it develops a greater awareness of self and life. Good writing offers the greatest opportunity to communicate trust and the courage to confront, even to initiate, conflict that inspires the change necessary for growth and development. Suggestions for classroom instruction are provided for the genres of fiction, poetry, drama, film and TV. (Twenty references are attached.) (MG)

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TEACHING CREATIVE WRITING IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY:

ADDRESSING ALL THE GENRES

AN ABSTRACT

Penelope Prentice

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Since the decline of the writer-hero of the twenties, such as Fitzgerald and Hemingway, whose work popularized writing on a massive scale, and spawned college creative writing courses in fiction and poetry, this country's shift to an emphasis on visual literacy, in the media and film, now requires a response of college English educators to prepare our students for the next century. This paper argues for an expansion in the creative writing curriculum to cover all genres, from the traditional poetry, fiction and drama, to writing for the media, film and TV.

I submit 1) that the essential principles or writing in all genres, poetry, fiction, drama, TV and film can be taught, with the positive effect of saving a serious writing student years of stumbling in the dark, and 2) that a responsible creative writing course of the present and future must be sensitive to serious writing students' needs by preparing them for writing for radio, film and TV (noting, for example, demands very different for writing for stage), without ignoring the important, traditional genres. Moreover, I offer practical direction for implementing such a curriculum in even the most modest college creative writing program which may consist of no more than a single course.

A course so developed might not only, in the long term, contribute to upgrading writing in the media, but it currently affords the professionally bent student writer the best prepara-

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tion by linking the genres, demonstrating, for example, how poetry and film must both move audiences a long distance in a relatively short space of time by shared techniques, such as controlling images, and a powerful, emotional closure. The course offers the more casual student a greater appreciation of writing while it develops a greater awareness of self, and life.

My paper discusses the essential techniques in each area, while it emphasizes suggestions for evoking values deeply and powerfully felt within the writer. Surveying the best research from the literature and lectures of the great writing teachers, past and present in all areas, I have prepared my collection of suggested in-class exercises and writing assignments, as well as a bibliography for the audience for further direction. The paper is designed to inspire courage in the beginning creative writing instructor, offer fresh tools for the basic English professor, as well as to encourage the seasoned creative writing professor to expand course offerings. The paper runs eighteen minutes.

I believe my proposed course is as important as any in literature, physics or philosophy, because it is through writing, reflecting, viewing and reading that we develop the awareness, and insights to build the private self, the foundation for all else in the public and global spheres. Good writing, great writing, still offers the greatest opportunity to the communicate trust and the courage to confront, even to initiate conflict that inspires the change necessary for growth and development.

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TEACHING CREATIVE WRITING IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY:

ADDRESSING ALL THE GENRES

Penelope Prentice

As we approach a new century, a glance back on attitudes toward teaching writing reveals the full range of views, from the classic, teaching writing by imitation, through recent free-writing techniques endorsing Virginia Woolf's assertion that we can find "diamonds in the dustheap" of our journals, to the perennial notion that creative writing can't be taught at all. The twenties of this century spawned the writer-hero such as Hemingway, and Fitzgerald, as the supreme artist whose life and art were often inseparably interesting to audiences, and whose writing was taken to be a gift absolute--you either have "it" or you don't. "It" was, and still is, often called talent.

Norman Mailer, a self-proclaimed inheritor of the writer-hero myth, marks the end of that era in his introduction to the Fiction Writer's Handbook: "Not many can be can be left in that small world of a few writers and teachers and editors who believed there were not many vocations more honored than writing, nor many occupations more interesting than to encourage the talent of a young writer. Today a young man or woman of talent goes to college with the idea of getting into film, or TV, or media, or rock..." (xix)

I submit 1) that many essential principles of writing in all genre, poetry, fiction, and drama, can be taught, with the positive effect of saving a serious writing student years of stumbling in the dark, and 2) that a responsible creative writing

course of the present and future be sensitive to serious writing students' needs by preparing them for writing for radio, film and TV (noting demands very different for writing for stage, for example), without ignoring the traditional genre. Moreover, I would like offer practical direction for implementing such a curriculum in even the most modest college creative writing program which may consist of no more than a single course.

A course so developed might not only contribute to upgrading writing in the media, but it affords the professionally bent student writer the best preparation by linking the genres, demonstrating how both poetry and film, for example, must both move audiences a long distance in a relatively short space of time by techniques that are often shared. Such a course also offers the more casual student a greater appreciation of literature and the media as it develops, as any good writing course does, a greater awareness of self, and life around her or him.

Mailer opens his preface with accolades for writing courses he took at Harvard in 1939: "The first stricture of the course was a wise one: writing is an extension of speech we were told. So we were instructed to try to write with something of the ease with which we might speak, and that is a good rule for beginners. In time it can be absorbed, taken for granted, and finally disobeyed. The best writing comes obviously out of a precision we do not and dare not employ when we speak, yet such writing still has the ring of speech. It is a style in short that can take you a life to achieve." (xvii-xviii)

Under the rubric of creative writing falls a haphazard

offering of courses, most often in a single genre, generally fiction or poetry, offered sometimes by a writer-teacher in her or his own genre. In large universities writing for TV and film, split off from its traditional roots in English, becomes the province media departments, and is small colleges, is ignored. The rare course in writing for the stage, such as George Barker's course attended by O'Neill at Harvard, is offered primarily at schools with strong theatre departments. Why?

If the injunction "write about what you know about" holds true for the writer, "teach what you know" would seem to apply doubly to the professor of creative writing. The result is that some of the most gifted writing teachers, who have never written anything, for instance, but poetry, such as Buffalo's acclaimed poet Carl Dennis who has never written a word of fiction, may teach poetry writing exclusively. I am by no means advocating the elimination of such a fine course, but suggesting that where curricula are being developed, a broader based course at least be considered, and wherever feasible, be implemented. Since some of the best writing courses are taught by people who consider themselves primarily teachers, and not writers at all, one way to prepare is to take courage, roll up the sleeves and attempt each of the genre while, as in any preparation for any other course, to research it. While much nonsense and misdirection has been written about writing, several outstanding texts and seminars I shall recommend in each area, have surfaced.

What is creative writing (a term I am loath to use, preferring instead imaginative writing)? The oldest definitions described it by its function, what it does: delights and instructs

(it is dulce et utile--sweet and useful). Poetry comes from the root word meaning "to make", drama from "dran"--meaning "to act," and fiction means something made up (hopefully to tell some greater truth). Film and TV require combine a story teller's art with images and dialog to convey a vision. I like to think that drama at its best provides two hours that can change your life--at least briefly. What does imaginative writing teach? Insights. At is finest, I believe it is one soul speaking directly to another, and reading or viewing great work can give reader and audience another lifetime within this brief life. The task of teaching imaginative writing is one of showing students how to create the balance between making and allowing writing to happen: between learning the basic principles (what has worked for others, not abstract rules), while evoking what is best, brightest, dark, and deepest in the writer, in all men and women.

The great end of imaginative writing, as I see it, is to move the audience's head through its heart. A good creative writing course can acquaint students with some of the simplest techniques for creating emotion, while at the same time directing students to evoke from within their own finest feelings and ideas.

THE MYTH OF TALENT AND WHAT A CREATIVE WRITING COURSE CAN OFFER

A good creative writing course comes without any guarantees except the promise that if the student delves deeply enough, and continues to write, the student will (probably) get better (the latter, suggested by poet Marvin Bell speaking at Bread Loaf, America's oldest writer's conference, 1975; parenthetical inter-

polation, mine). A ten-year apprenticeship is not uncommon; witness, Hawthorne, Milton, Edward Albee. I once had the opportunity to see Albee's unpublished manuscripts at the Lincoln center Library of the Performing Arts and learned an invaluable lesson that I couldn't wait to bring home to my students. As I looked at his ten years of work written on yellow paper (he later confessed was stolen from Western Union where he worked as a telegraph deliverer) I discovered that there was almost no hint of the "talent"--the wit and vision that would later produce WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF? The breakthrough, when it came in "Zoo Story" and "Sand Box" was almost absolute, and could not have been predicted in terms of his apprenticeship work. The same could be said of Whitman. Whitman's banal journalism could not have predicted his revolutionary poetry that would make him a literary papa of almost every major American poet who would follow him. Albee was the last American dramatist to achieve national and international fame that made him nearly a household word. No other dramatist since has done so.

The simple point here is that a student should not take a creative writing course to ask, Do I have talent? nor should a student be flattered or crushed when a teacher, fellow student or friend pronounces that a first work shows or lacks talent. It is simply too soon to say until a writer has been writing for a some time and tested the writing in the world. And like Emily Dickinson, even in a lifetime it may be impossible to say, merely judging by the world's reception. More important, a student should hope to gain from a course some awareness of strengths, confidence and power from mastery, and the continued pleasure of

discovery in writing.

There are only two things all writers have in common. They all read, and they all write. Two of the best writing teachers I know, poet Carl Dennis and the late Donald Barthelme offered the best, and simplest general direction. Carl Dennis says a writing course can offer you two things: 1) an opportunity to write--a gun to your head that can be as productive as any muse, and 2) direction in reading. Fiction writer Donald Barthelme took it further recommending that students should read the great books--all of them, in all fields. And he saw his job as helping students write what they want to write. It is from him I gained my own direction in teaching, and the thrust of this paper.

In the wake of the Fitzgerald-Hemingway era, where television has dissolved and displaced the fantasy-glamour short fiction markets that glittered their way into many a drab or more ordinary life via slick magazines such as the Saturday Evening Post, writing is no longer limited to, or even focused primarily on fiction. Students want to know how to write novels and short stories--but short fiction is an area of writing that once, but no longer, can provide a living for many such as Fitzgerald and a host of minor writers. The media, is now that avenue for writing and earning one's keep at many different levels.

VALUES, VOICE, AND VISION

Ultimately the creative writing teacher wants to point a student toward looking for what I believe are the three distinguishing marks of the great writer--that which separates him or her from the merely good--the writer must have his or her own

values, voice and vision.

VALUES: help students discover their own values by raising the question, What do you care about, want, wish for, desire, love and hate? In yourself, in your community, in the world? Values can be pursued by acquainting students with the great books, and students should be encouraged to study philosophy, the sciences, to begin by reading more of what they love--the complete works of a favorite author, letters, journals, biographies.

VOICE: direct students toward finding their own voices through listening exercises, and encouraging an appreciation of their own speaking and writing. Writing which is contrived, a mask that conceals rather than reveals a self should not be promoted, and perhaps the best text for encouraging development of voice is Brenda Ueland's If You Want to Write, (a text recently mentioned on the front cover of the New York Times Book Review as the most widely recommended book on writing). The best exercises I know on developing voice come from story workshop techniques developed in Chicago. An adaptation of these exercises, in the first handout, when used in class will show students that what they say is inextricable tied to an image (See Handout One).

VISION: vision is seeing; Einstein said he thought in images, and all writing is in service of one's vision. Virginia Woolf called vision that which distinguishes the good from the great. Saul Bellow admits he never found his, and Tom Fontana, writer/producer of ST. ELSEWHERE and TATTINGER'S says that his primary advice to young writers is "be to be true to your own vision, because that is ultimately all any writer has to offer." A first step in discovering, and I believe, developing one's

vision comes from Hemingway's insight that his greatest difficulty was finding out what he really felt and distinguishing it from what he was supposed to feel. A good exercise in working toward developing vision is to have students take a received value they disapprove, examine it from all sides, and write a story which promotes their own view, incorporating what they value and love.

Imaginative literature probes and reveals the private world of the self, family, friends, lovers, the imagination, psyche, unconscious, spirit, soul, dreams, nightmares, hopes and desires to develop insight into that world upon which all our other worlds are based: the public and global. In a complex, and difficult world it is imperative that we take "Know Thyself" as seriously as we automatically take seriously the pursuit of any other serious study in our major field, and it is literature, above all else, I believe writing and reading, seeing, hearing it, that best illuminates the self and offers others a fresh vision for the future.

In my creative writing course students submit only two projects delivered to the class (revised for the final portfolio at the end), in any genre. Daily exercises and instruction acquaint them with work in all genre. I find when much is demanded, much is produced.

A good creative writing course should help a student discover strengths, offer tools to develop, and the courage to go on in the face of what will be difficult odds at best.

STARTING WITH FICTION

I suggest beginning with fiction because everyone has a story, and it is easiest both to teach and to master short fiction with some success. Whatever a professor begins with is what will be primarily produced in a writing class. Hence, beginning a term with poetry produces more poetry than fiction. Students put their attention and freshest energy into their first work before the competing homework and exams from other "real" classes overtake them.

Fiction writing technique can be summarized simply as:

Get your character up a tree

Throw rocks at your character

Get your character down out of the tree

(or don't, and not before you've thrown one last rock)

Writing fiction goes against our natural humanistic impulse to help people. No sooner do we see our character in distress than we are tempted to rescue our character. But to do so destroys the story. Do we throw rocks because we are sadistic, and we assume our reader enjoys watching other people get into trouble?

It might seem the fiction writer must be cruel, or, as is often argued, that the reader can only learn what someone is capable of doing when that person is tested. But, in truth, what conflict at its best teaches us is <u>trust</u>.[1]

Fiction and drama writers examine and test the limits of human ability to act in order to dramatize change, which ultimately conveys trust in the human ability to

grow, transform or transcend a former self. Even when a character fails (perhaps especially when he or she fails) human beings are depicted as having choice, could have chosen differently, and have acted on that choice to change themselves and others. Great writing in turn heightens awareness, trusts audience's ability to change by raising the question: How are you living your life?

ELEMENTS OF FICTION: I

Character

Conflict

Choice/Chance (in balance)

CHANGE (or failure to change)

WHY (theme)

CHARACTER; character is a WHO that desires A WHAT--is revealed through desire in action.

Ask students, Is what is wanted worth wanting (values)? Discuss the vanity of human wishes. Discuss fame and fortune as illusory goals. Note Wilde's "There are only two tragedies in life--getting nothing you want, and getting everything you want." "If only I could have X then I would be happy" lures us down dark alleys of nightmare fears and does not permit the full flowering of love. Getting what we want almost always is only half of what we expected: cf. Chekhov's "Gooseberries." Fiction and drama confront illusion: stripping away of false values. (Oedipus and George and Martha)

CONFLICT

Outer: what the character wants and the attempts made to get it should be equal in power to those obstacles which prevent

attaining the goal.

Inner: the most powerful conflict (the best stories have both).

CHOICE/CHANCE: must be present in equal balance. If central characters have no control, or total control, the story is boring.

CHANGE: how is the character better able to live the rest of his or her life? What's gained. What's lost? Be sure to have both. All real change brings both gain and loss.

ELEMENTS OF FICTION II

THE HOOK: at the beginning; who, what, where, when, and why raises the question Who wants what? As soon as we know who wants what we are interested in that character. Most short fiction editors want to be hooked by the end of the first paragraph, and no later by the end of the first page. The most seductive hook involves no tricks; nothing is more enchanting that a close-up "camera" eye letting the reader see, hear, touch, feel what the main character is experiencing.

PLOT: what happens in sequential order--seven basic plots: man against man, against nature, himself, society, etc. Scott Meridith literary agency gets thirty books a week agents want to publish. The greatest source or rejection--99%--comes from inability to plot.

Where do you start? As close to the end as possible. <u>In medias res</u> is too early. Start later.

In a short story aim for three conflicts, and at each choice a character makes, a new conflict arises, each of greater magnitude, and at each conflict the character is changed (or fails to change) somewhat. In the popular novel something muct happen or

change every five hundred words (in film, every five to seven minutes). It all leads to:

ENDINGS: should be inevitable and astonishing.

THE PAY-OFF: what emotion does the writer create to make us feel have we learned why the main character (and hence ourselves) changes or fails to change?

POINT OF VIEW: two weeks might be devoted just to point of view exercises as students learn the strengths and limitations of the four major points of view: first person, third person limited, omniscient and dramatic. Each should be demonstrated ("Hills Like White Elephants" nicely exemplifies the dramatic point of view), and attempted (have students eavesdrop on two conflicts they witness, then write the each conflict from two different points of view; eavesdropping is an exercise recommended by John Gardner).

STYLE: choice of words, such as learned, streety, colloquial, bombastic, inspiring. Sometimes style is called, "The crowning achievement of the civilized man."

PLACE (setting): includes the place or room, the city, the country, the time in the history of the world.

ATMOSPHERE: can be intimate, spacious, grand, stormy.

MOOD: as in human moods are happy, sad, anxious, calm, passionate.

TONE: is the author's attitude toward subject, (to life; values).

TEXTURE: minimilst, thin, rich, transparent.

CHECKLIST FOR STUDENT RESPONSES TO STORIES:

Is the story clear? Is it memorable? Did it move me?

BUILDING A STORY THE FIRST DAY IN CLASS: AN EXERCISE

Direct students to do or answer the following on paper:

Think list three stories they would like to write.

Circle one.

Who is the main character?

What is that character's name (beginning writers think it is cute to withhold that information)

What does that character want more than anything else?

What else does the character want?

What three things does the character try to do to get that thing he or she wants more than anything else in the world?

Who and/or what three things happen to prevent the character from getting the desired end? Remember the self as often the biggest obstacle.

How does the character overcome each obstacle?

How is the character changed at each obstacle?

Does the character get what is wanted at the end?

WHY or why not?

POETRY

What is poetry? Poetry is concentrated language which moves the head through the heart by means of images the reader feels. It often runs skinny down the page. I insist students must read ten poems before they write one, twenty-five before they submit their project.

Poems work like funnels, (or Scientific American magazine articles); they start with broad, easy to understand images and ideas move to a concentrated and powerful closure. Frost said a good poem sends a shiver up your spine.

CLOSURE: begin with the end: "Richard Cory." A good closure throws a reader back into the poem, and to life.

OPENER: it may be surprising to learn, and sometimes takes good poets years to discover, that the beginning best answers the questions: Who, where, when? The reader needs to see this no less than in journalism.

IMAGES: poetry rides on its images (see Two Haiku, Handout Three). Strong verbs--the strength in our language comes in our verbs (after students get past the Edgar Allen Poe adjective phase).

RHYTHM AND METER: acquaint students with the common metrical forms, and demonstrate the distinction between rhythm and meter. (Marvin Bell once did this by singing "Ta, Ra, Ra, Boom De Ay" to "The Hollow Men").

RHYME: must be used purposefully. Begin by showing how bad rhyme can be unintentionally comical; cite Twain's "William Dowling Botts/Died of measles spots," to show that whereas rhyme should elevate the subject, here is devalues it.

FORM: have students attempt all major forms from the limerick to the sonnet and vilanelle; read Shakespeare's great sonnets to show how the turns work, "Do not go Gentle into That Good Night", and "The Waking."

DRAMA

Drama is the most difficult of all forms, and unlike poetry or fiction, was rarely, perhaps only twice, in the history of the world, great--consider, the Greeks, and Shakespeare. It took America a hundred years to get our first dramatist, O'Neill; we had fine poets and fiction writers earlier. In drama we must see man and woman in action. The action of drama requires a certain sophistication in the culture, wisdom in the writer who has the ability to please, enthrall, move large numbers of people.

Begin by reviewing elements of fiction:

Primary character--wants something

Antagonist--stands in the way

Secondary character--may support or prevent character from getting what he/she wants.

Tertiary--may be important for plot.

SITUATION: is state of affairs. John comes down the stairs (it is not, in and of itself, dramatic)[2].

INCIDENTS: contain significant action, action that leads to another incident. John throws an ashtray at Ruth and leaves her.

SIGNIFICANT ACTION: forwards the plot.

PROPOSITION: Will Cinderella got to the ball? Will Jack Worthing find parents? Will Hamlet kill Claudius?

CLIMAX: the DEED performed by the central character, the most violent dislocation between the central and secondary character.

CONDITION OF THE ACTION: first significant action

UNITY OF OPPOSITES: the true dilemma; a pimp asks for more money from a prostitute. She has a sick husband she loves who needs the money for medical treatment, but if she refuses the pimp he

may kill her which would also kill her husband. (Egri, 118)

THE CLIMAX: is an incident which involves not a second but third character, not Juliet but Tybalt, not Lady Bracknell, but Miss Prisim, not Claudius but Polonius, not Desdemona but Cassio. Why? Because the condition and cause of the action both involve central characters and the second character.

SUSPENSE, MYSTERY AND ANTICIPATION: the primary means of moving an audience (see Handout Four for definitions and techniques for developing them).

SUBTEXT: the story beneath the story, what the play is really about and the means of conveying the author's vision.

ENDINGS/THE INEXORABLE UNFOLDING OF EVENTS: the climax points to the resulting action, and as in fiction it should be inevitable and astonishing.

Cost: an off-off Broadway or regional theatre production requires about $400,000. At least that much again must be invested in advertising if a New York production is to survive. Most fail, and of the 2,000 to 5,000 new scripts in the country each year only five percent are ever produced, of those only three precent are produced again or have a life, and of the total only seven percent are by women. The playwright's share is small, hence the common adage: It is possible to make a killing but not a living in theatre. Killings are generally made on musicals and thrillers, rarely on straight plays.

FILM (AND TV)

Function of film: TO CREATE EMOTION. Film is one of the most powerful means of transmitting ideas into a society.

FOUR CORNERSTONES OF FILM:[3]

STORY CONCEPT	CHARACTER
INDIVIDUAL SCENES	PLOT/WHAT HAPPENS/WHEN

STORY CONCEPT: every movie can be reduced to one sentence: it's a story about _____(character) who wants _____(to do what visible action).

CHARACTER: the story must have a hero/heroine(s) udience must identify with. What creates identification? He or she must have a visible motivation, may want something (for self, others, for civilization),or be the victim of undeserved misfortune, or be funny. Reveal a character's good qualities before bad.

HIGH CONCEPT: the story should possess/convey a title, FATAL ATTRACTION, or story concept makes people want to line up. Combine familiarity with originality, and offer a SECOND SELL--OFFICER AND A GENTLEMEN: Zack wants to be an officer AND win the love of Paula (romance is often the second sell).

MOTIVATION

Outer	Inner	
What?	Why?	(outer answered by what, inner, why?
VISIBLE	Invisible	(outer must be visible)
Action	Dialogue	(outer revealed in action, inner, dialogue)
Plot	Theme	(outer reflected in plot, inner, in theme)

Outer motivation is ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY. It is the most important concept of all in screenplays. Inner motivation is optional.

CHARACTERS:

Hero (audience wants what hero/heroine wants)

Nemesis (most stands in hero's way)

Reflection (most like the hero)

Romance (must support hero but be at crosspurposes)

GROWTH: revealed at each obstacle and through echoing devices (a repeated word, or scene revealing some change; the three breakfast scenes between father and son in KRAMER VS KRAMER).

THEME emerges when hero's similarity to nemesis and difference from the reflection is revealed.[4]

STRUCTURE: is choice a character makes, a series of events selected from story material composed in a strategic sequence to express the writer's vision to arouse specific emotions or express a view of the world; forty to sixty events in film, less that forty in theatre, and each represents a moment of change.[5] There are always three acts; each ends at point of highest change. THE TURNING POINT or the GAP is the transition between expection and result to put values at risk and it is the point where the audience experiences emotion; the effects are suspense, insight, and a new direction. How a writer turns a story is how he expresses vision. "Screenplays are structure." William Goldwyn.

ACT: (three) built from scenes that lead to a climax, the moment of meaningful change.

SCENE: a sequence of beats that bring about change.

BEAT: specific human behavior, action, reaction; the adjustment that takes place when behavior changes.

The three acts are divided in time: I = 1/4; II = 1/2; III-1/4.

TV follows the film format, with structure built around commercial breaks; a one hour show is 46 minutes 37 seconds EXACTLY. A half hour show breaks twice.

ENDINGS: climax of the last act. THE ENDING IS EVERYTHING (film is 75% structure, 25% dialogue); action proves the idea ("Wrap an idea in an emotion so the audience never forgets it" (McKee)).

Cost: 30 million--20 to make a film, 10 to promote it. Average amount paid to writer: $35,000 is the lowest for film, and about $20,000 for a single episode for a TV series. It is possible to make a living, even a handsome one writing for film and TV, even for peripheral writing, story treatments (a ten to fifty page summary story of the story), or as a script doctor.

A CONCLUSION ON TEACHING CREATIVE WRITING

I believe we all come to writing because of the writing we love. The masters raise, even provoke, questions rather than answer them, and they all trust their audiences. I believe that that same trust is what the good teacher must invest in students till they learn to trust themselves. But first a professor must learn to trust the self through mastery of subject, and continuing work, growth and discovery. My paper is offered to inspire courage in those teachers who are taking their first steps on a path I began over twenty years ago, and it is here to renew the spirits of those who go before me, he wise and seasoned professors of creative writing but may wish to enlarge their offerings. Our task is an important one, no less so than any literature, physics or philosophy course. We are examining, challenging and changing people at the most private level, the base on which all other public and global life is built.

FOOTNOTES

[1]It may be worth considering the importance of trust and how it is communicated in the following: "In classes on literature we are taught that 'character determines action.' I would paraphrase that to say self-concept determines destiny. Or to speak with greater restraint and precision, there is a strong tendency for self-concept to determine destiny." Nathaniel Branden, The Psychology of Romantic Love quoted in Women and Self-Esteem Linda Sanford and Mary Ellen Donovan.

[2] Adapted from Bernard Grebanier, Playwrighting.

[3] Adapted from Michael Hague seminar "Screenwriting A to Z."

[4] When Zack IN OFFICER AND A GENTLEMAN is most like his nemesis, Foly his sergeant who has taught him that he must be for his men, and most unlike his best friend who gives up himself for his pregnant girlfriend: Zack learns the balance and thus becomes an officer)

[5] Adapted from Robert McKee seminar "Story Structure".

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HANDOUT NUMBER ONE

Story workshop exercises to developing voice and vision:

Read students a story (poem, play)

Have the students sit in a circle and in turn ask each give an image or remembered phrase from the story--something they saw or heard, not something they analyzed or abstracted from the story--in as few words as possible, one word may be enough. (can be used in a lit/comp class to stimulate discussion, and works well).

Then have students in turn, without planning in advance, see something--e.g., ball, car--again, one word. SEE it, actually SEE IT IN THE MIND, then SAY it, then let it go. Give it a momentary pause so the rest of the group can SEE it, then go on to the next. There are only two rules: you can't refer to something in the room, or free associate from something another person said, e.g., ball; bat.

Repeat that with a verb. Use present tense only, but SEE it: e.g., "run".

Repeat the exercise with a motion--using the whole body: "kick," and the foot kicks. This teaches students that come from the entire body, not just the mouth, or pen.

Repeat the exercise with person-verb--(person can only be man, woman, boy, girl--so that everyone can see his or her own image and the verb must be present tense)--e.g. "boy runs."

Repeat the exercise with person-verb-person, e.g. "boy touches man."

Take the time to ask at the end of several rounds which verbs students SAW, and ask what they saw. The class will get into the habit of SEEING words, feelings, and ideas. Select one or two of the best person-verb-person examples the students offered and have them write using the past tense about what they saw--have them write the story. Have them stop. Begin again at once describing what happened three days later, or the day before.

The exercise will surprisingly reveal to the student and the teacher those moments when a student is speaking in his or her own voice. The teacher and students will be able to hear the difference between the spontaneously spoken/seen word, and the word manufactured in advance, or spoken from an absent self.

FICTION WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

IMAGINATION STRETCHING EXERCISE

The Mirror Exercise: Imagine yourself in a room with a mirror; imagine that you step up to that mirror; imagine that you put your hands on that mirror and suddenly step through the mirror. Now, see the room from the other side. In a one-page story answer the following: What does the main character want? Does he or she get it (try at least three attempts one of which must be a failure)? Why does the character succeed, or why not?

Write a description of a character by surroundings.

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